

## **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this plan is to maintain ecosystem health, facilitate multiple use management, while meeting human needs in providing a diversity of benefit opportunities. The need for the plan is to promote biodiversity and sustainable ecosystems while meeting human needs for a variety of uses such as high quality recreation activities and grazing.

The Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge Ecosystem encompasses a wide variety of settings that provide a great diversity of benefits to users and inhabitants of the area. This statement is at the heart of why this plan was written. The users in this case include a wide variety of recreationalists and traditional users such as ranchers as well as wildlife and plant species. To understand the approach taken in this plan, one needs to understand the concept of "benefits" and how it is being used to manage the resources present in this ecosystem. This is a "benefits-based" integrated resource management plan that goes beyond the traditional approach of managing each component of the ecosystem separately. It recognizes that the components of the ecosystem are linked and that each one contributes benefits to humans and non-humans alike.

"Benefits Based Management" (BBM), as defined in this plan are: changes that are viewed to be advantageous or improvements in condition (gains) to individuals (psychological and physiological), to groups, to society, or even to another entity such as an endangered species; the prevention of worse conditions; and realization of desired and satisfying on-site psychological experiences. The management objectives outlined in Chapter 5 are prescriptions to deliver targeted benefits for the major components addressed in this plan -- the recreational experience, vegetation, soil, water, air, wildlife and the archaeologic, historic and paleontological resource. Under a BBM approach, management objectives are the desired outcomes and benefits that we hope to maintain or achieve for each component of the ecosystem.

Data on the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge area benefit opportunities was gathered from several sources. Qualitative focus group interviews were completed with area user groups. Managers were interviewed to determine the benefits they believe the area provides. On-site visitors and community leaders were also administered surveys to help planning team members define linkages between benefits and the originating activities, settings, and experiences.

The planning area has been divided into three zones; 1) north of the river, 2) the Colorado River, and 3) south of the river. These zones were determined on the basis of a commonality of distinctive features and attractions, visitor use characteristics, and a resulting sense of homogeneity as logical management units (see map on page vi). In order to better define the recreational experience opportunities, several of these zones were further subdivided (see map on page ix).

The team which was assembled to develop a plan for the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge ecosystem was called the "Ad-Hoc committee". It consisted of a wide variety of disciplines from the Colorado Division of Wildlife, the National Park Service, BLM, business owners, grazing permittees, outfitters and guides, mountain bikers, hikers, OHV users, environmental organizations, and many other concerned citizens. It is an officially sanctioned working group under the Northwest Resource Advisory Council. Ad-hoc committee members and their affiliation are as follows:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation/Interest</u>
Brenda Sabo	Audubon Society
Yeulin Willett	River Front Commission
Hawk Greenway	Rancher
Warren Gore	Rancher
Bill Hamann	Colorado Mountain Club
Jann Ertle	Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce
Rick Corbin	Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Curt Lane	Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Jim Majors	Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Derek Firth	Motorcycle Trail Riders Assoc.
Tom Klienschnitz	River Outfitter
Debbie Kovalik	Grand Junction Visitor & Convention Bureau
David Blair	Aid, Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell
Keith Fife	Mesa County Planning Department
Bill Schapley	Sierra Club, Uncompahgre Chapter
Danni Langdon	Interested Citizen
Jan McLean	Museum of Western Colorado
John Schneiger	City of Fruita
Helen Traylor	Audubon Society
John Schler	Department of Local Affairs
Steve Yamashita	Colorado Division of wildlife
Steve Hickman	National Park Service, Colorado National Mon.
Cathie Zarlingo	Resource Advisory Council

This interdisciplinary process and formulation of the plan began with the team's articulation of a common vision (see Chapter 3). From this vision, general management goals were developed, BBM objectives were defined and management actions were agreed upon. Special work group teams were also assembled to work on issues relating to recreation, river management and desired plant communities.

These team members are as follows:

#### Recreation Work Group

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation/Interest</u>
Steve Djokic	Interested Citizen
Neal McKinstry	Horseback Riding
Travis Baier	River Outfitter & Guide
Bill Baird	Jet Boater/Big Game & Waterfowl Hunting
Rick Corbin	Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Bill Schapley	Sierra Club, Uncompahgre Chapter
Larry Bullard	Western Slope River Boat Assoc.
Loretta Chessmore	Interested Citizen, Loma
Lovell Sasser	Horseback Riding
Yeulin Willett	Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
John Martin	Motorcycle Trail Riders Assoc.
Pete Atkinson	Kayaker
Mark Peterson	Western Slope River Boat Assoc.
Paul Kuckyt	Interested Citizen
Norm Mullen	Colorado Environmental Coalition
John Lynn	Interested Citizen, Glade Park
Penth Seppone	Interested Citizen
Mike O'Boyle	Hiking & Biking
Howard Scott	Interested Citizen
Ronda Bucchela	Biking & River Floating
Steve Garner	Interested Citizen

#### Ruby Canyon River Management Working Group

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Mark Peterson	Western Slope River Boat Assoc.
Tom Klienschnitz	River Outfitter (Adventure Bound)
Jerry Nolan	W.A.T.E.R.
Pete Atkinson	River Outfitter (Whitewater West)
Bill Baird	Private User
Gary Hunt	Western Colorado Jet Ski Assoc.
Chris Foreman	Colorado State Parks
Steve Gibson	Private Landowner

### Desired Plant Community Team

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Tom Kleinschnitz	Adventure Bound
Curt Lane	Mountain Biker
Neal McKinstry	Horseback Club
Jerry Nolan	W.A.T.E.R.
August Aubert	Rancher
Mike Lawson	Rancher
Dave Farny	Rancher
Daryl Iser	Desert Bighorn Sheep Society
Richard Levad	Audubon Society
Bill Schapley	Sierra Club
Patrick Perrotti	Colorado National Monument
Paul Creeden	Colorado Division of Wildlife
Don Gore	Rancher
Stephen Greenway	Rancher
Warren Gore	Rancher
Wayne Pond	Rancher

It is envisioned that the Ad-Hoc committee and work teams will continue to assist managers in implementing the plan as well as assessing its overall success in achieving desired benefits. Monitoring and evaluation of management actions will be undertaken to determine their effectiveness at resolving certain issues. The effectiveness of management actions will determine if they will be continued, expanded, refined or abandoned. Plan refinement, through the identification of new issues, the identification of new technologies and information to resolve issues, would be an ongoing process by the Ad-Hoc committee and any interested public or agency representative.

The management plans that exist now will continue to guide specific areas and resources within the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge area such as McDonald Creek Cultural Resource Area or the desert bighorn sheep. This plan will be used to help ensure the integration of management between all activities and eliminate contradictory management actions. Through the process of continual refinement, this plan could be continually amended as new issues arise and as new information is made available regarding the benefits based management system. Thus the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge plan is expected to have an indefinite life span.

## **PLANNING AREA DESCRIPTION**

### **DESCRIPTION OF MANAGEMENT ZONES**

#### **I. SOUTH OF THE RIVER**

Located on the northwest flank of the Uncompahgre Plateau, this zone is characterized by a series of seven spectacular canyons separated by high mesas. The canyons reach depths of more than 800 feet and contain a variety of erosional features including arches, alcoves, and spires. Intermittent water courses drain these canyons. Some canyon floors have been eroded to expose Pre-Cambrian igneous and metamorphic rock which have created scenic water falls and pools. All canyons drain into the Colorado River. Elevations range from 4,300 feet at the river to a high point of 7,130 feet on Black Ridge.

The canyons display scattered pinyon-juniper woodlands in the broad open areas and grassy meadows and riparian vegetation (cottonwoods, willow, box elder) along the canyon bottoms. Pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush parks are the dominant vegetation in the upland areas.

A major part of this zone is the 73,000-acre Black Ridge Canyons Wilderness Study Area (WSA) which has been recommended to Congress for wilderness designation. According to the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge User Study, the most satisfying activities by sub-zone are: Rattlesnake Arches-Pollock Canyon - 1st, hiking/walking, 2nd, mountain biking, 3rd, sight seeing/driving for pleasure. The zone is bordered on the east by the Colorado National Monument which also has acreage under consideration for wilderness.

For purposes of the recreation user study, this zone was divided into two recreation sub-zones: Rattlesnake Arches/Pollock Canyon and Mee, Knowles and Jones Canyons. See Map on page ix).

#### **II. COLORADO RIVER**

This zone extends from Snooks Bottom, one mile southwest of Fruita to the Colorado-Utah State Line (21 miles). It includes Horsethief and Ruby Canyon and is very scenic with its ruby red canyon walls and erosional features. The zone includes the river, its floodplain, and the hill

and canyon walls visible by the river user. The river in one location has exposed black, metamorphic rocks which it has sculpted and polished creating a major attraction. Sandy beaches characterize much of the shoreline.

Cottonwoods, willows and tamarisk are common along the shoreline. Cheatgrass has invaded the corridor. Pinyon and juniper grow scattered near the river and along the base of the cliffs.

The Colorado River has sufficient flow to support floatboating year round. Floatboats (rafts, canoes, kayaks) provide the easiest access to the spectacular canyons that drain into this river corridor. According to the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge User Study, the most satisfying recreation activities for this zone are: 1st, rafting and 2nd canoeing/kayaking. The float trip is 25 miles long between the Loma Launch site and the Westwater, Utah takeout.

### **III. NORTH OF THE RIVER**

This zone extends from the cliff line on the north side of the river to about two miles north of Interstate-70.

This zone on the northwest flank of the Uncompahgre Plateau has been eroded into broad valleys, sloping mesas, steep hills and sandstone canyons. This variety of topography is a rich recreation resource providing for many activities. The principle drainage is McDonald Creek (intermittent) which helped to form Rabbit Valley as well as a scenic sandstone canyon. The area is rich in a variety of vertebrate fossils and an active quarry is located along the Trail Through Time.

Vegetation ranges from grasses and desert shrubs in the lower elevations to pinyon-juniper woodlands along the slopes and in higher elevations. Riparian vegetation grows along lower McDonald Creek.

Challenging mountain bike, hiking, motorized and horseback riding trails occur in this zone. The Kokopelli Mountain Bike Trail crosses the entire length of this zone. Interstate-70 provides easy access to the area and a variety of recreation opportunities. According to the Ruby Canyon-Black Ridge Study, the most satisfying activities were (for the purpose of the recreation user study, the zone was divided into recreation sub-zones: Rabbit Valley/Trail Through Time and Lions and Mary's Loops):

Rabbit Valley/Trail Through Time - 1st, hiking/walking, 2nd, mountain biking, 3rd, viewing dinosaur fossils; and Lions and Mary's Loops - 1st, mountain biking, 2nd, horseback riding.

### 3 MANAGEMENT ZONES

## RECREATION MANAGEMENT ZONES

### MAP